

# Alabama Conservation- Our Success Story

Highlighting the work of the  
Conservation Partnership on  
Alabama's Private Lands





United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Service

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To those who care about Alabama's land and water,

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employees in Alabama are pleased to present this report to you—the stewards of Alabama's soil, water, and other natural resources. We are proud of the way our citizens have faced natural resource challenges and made significant conservation achievements during the past 50 years. We are proud to be part of a strong partnership that works to help private landowners make wise conservation decisions on their land each day.

Although we have made great strides, we still have much work to do. NRCS is an agency dedicated to the conservation of natural resources through technical assistance and outreach to all private landowners and landusers. We work through local and state partnerships to carry out federal conservation programs. We are committed to working with you to improve natural resources so that we continue to be a state with healthy and productive resources.

I invite you to study this report that highlights the condition of our natural resources and the many ways we have worked together for cleaner water, cleaner air, and a healthier land in Alabama. I hope that you will get to know NRCS better so that we may continue to work together to address conservation challenges in the future.

Thank you for your interest in conservation and for your contributions to the successful conservation effort in Alabama.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert N. Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

ROBERT N. JONES  
State Conservationist



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# Helping Care for the Land

**T**he USDA-Natural Resources Conservation

Service (NRCS) works hand-in-hand with the American people to conserve natural resources on private lands. NRCS works with landusers to develop an understanding of how natural resources relate to each other and to society, and NRCS works with landusers to develop and implement conservation plans on private lands.

## Mission

Our mission is to provide leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, improve, and maintain our natural resources and environment.

## Guiding Principles

NRCS values customers, partners, employees, natural resources, and heritage. As advocates of natural resources stewardship we will:

- provide quality service to all customers
- deliver the best available science-based technology
- work cooperatively with other agencies and organizations
- promote strong partnerships and teamwork
- support practical, voluntary solutions to natural resource problems.

## Helping People Care for the Land

The future of Alabama's environment depends on individual, voluntary decisions made by millions of private landowners. NRCS has the experience and capability to provide a variety of resource alternatives to help people make the right choices for their land.

## Speaking for the Land

As conservation advocates, NRCS reminds Alabamians that each time you buy a loaf of bread, get a drink of water, or simply take a walk in our bountiful forests, you are reaping the benefits of healthy, privately owned lands.





## Challenges and Priorities

**A**griculture and forestry are Alabama's No. 1 industries. Like our nation, Alabama was founded on agriculture and it still drives our state's economy.

Agriculture and forestry account for almost one-third of Alabama's \$4.9 billion annual payroll. Everybody benefits when we help agriculture. Agriculture touches all of us every day—the homes we live in, the clothes we wear, the food we eat, even part of the car we drive. Strong, viable agriculture and forestry in Alabama mean better products, more jobs, and a stronger economy.

To meet the challenges of improving our natural resources, NRCS has identified several priorities for 2000 and beyond.

### **Water Resource Management**

Sediment and nutrients are major pollutants of surface waters

in Alabama, and infiltration from agricultural land can cause groundwater pollution. Erosion on construction sites in urban areas is also a very serious concern.

Many soils have become productive because of properly installed drainage systems. Maintaining these systems is an important part of water management. Clean water for drinking and recreation is an essential component of a healthy state and people.

### **Sustainable Soil Resources**

Productive soil is critical to Alabama's economy, as 90 percent of the land is used for agriculture, including crop production, pastureland, and forestland. Keeping our land healthy and productive is beneficial to all Alabamians as well as the millions of people around the world who enjoy Alabama-grown products.



### **Forest Management**

Alabama has 22 million acres of forestland of which 70 percent is owned by private non-industrial forest landowners. These forests provide clean water, improve air quality, and may provide multiple uses such as timber, wildlife, recreation, and aesthetics. Multiple use management is encouraged through the TREASURE Forest Program.

### **Wetlands**

Alabama's wetlands offer many benefits, including floodwater storage, groundwater recharge, sediment and pollutant trapping, wildlife habitat, forest products,

and recreational opportunities. More than 12,000 acres of Alabama's wetlands have been restored, and restoration is in progress on 386 additional acres.

### **Watershed Rehabilitation**

A significant challenge facing Alabamians today is rehabilitation of flood control structures. Alabama has 108 watershed and flood control structures built by NRCS. These dams protect many communities and 500,000 acres of farmland. They also reduce damages to 375 bridges and 600 miles of roads with benefits exceeding \$9 million annually. Nearly two-thirds of these structures are reaching the end of



their expected life and need major repairs. About \$24 million is needed to rebuild and upgrade 21 structures and to repair 51 structures.

### **Nutrient and Pest Management**

Nutrients (including nitrogen and phosphorus) and pesticides are applied each year on Alabama cropland, forests, and pastures. While nutrients are essential for plant growth, they can cause problems in groundwater and surface water if applied at rates greater than crops can use. Proper nutrient and pest management

minimizes agricultural non-point source water pollution and improves the physical, technical, and biological conditions of the soil.

### **Grazing Management**

NRCS is a member of the Alabama Forage and Grassland Coalition that promotes forage quality and grazing management. They sponsor a forage conference and a grazing school to teach grazing management. Thus far, more than 150 people have attended four sessions of the grazing school.





### **Manure Management**

At the beginning of 2000, Alabama had about 175,000 hogs and 1.5 million cattle and calves. The poultry population in the state is now more than 970 million birds. Livestock operations are growing larger, concentrating more animals in smaller areas. Animal feeding operations (AFOs) are now being encouraged to develop comprehensive nutrient management plans (CNMPs).

Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) are operations with more than 1,000 animal units, or smaller operations that have been designated as a CAFO by the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM).

CAFOs are required to have certified CNMPs. NRCS and other partners assist landowners in development and implementation of these plans that will help reduce odor and improve profits, soil health, and water quality.

### **Grassland Management**

About 4 million acres in Alabama are used for pasture. Proper management of grassland resources improves water quality and provides habitat for numerous wildlife species.





# The Workforce and Budget

## NRCS Full Time Staff

The strength of NRCS is in its workforce—the men and women who work with private landowners to make sure that Alabamians have productive soil and clean water, and can enjoy all of the other benefits of healthy natural resources. Eighty percent of NRCS employees work in local offices throughout the state.

NRCS employees are dedicated to conservation. NRCS employs highly skilled technical experts in various fields to help meet the needs of all our customers. Some of the positions include:

- District Conservationist
- Soil Conservationist
- Soil Conservation Technician
- Agricultural Engineer
- Civil Engineering Technician
- Soil Scientist
- Biologist
- Forester
- Agricultural Economist
- Agronomist
- Cultural Resource Specialist
- Public Affairs Specialist
- Computer Specialist
- Rangeland Specialist

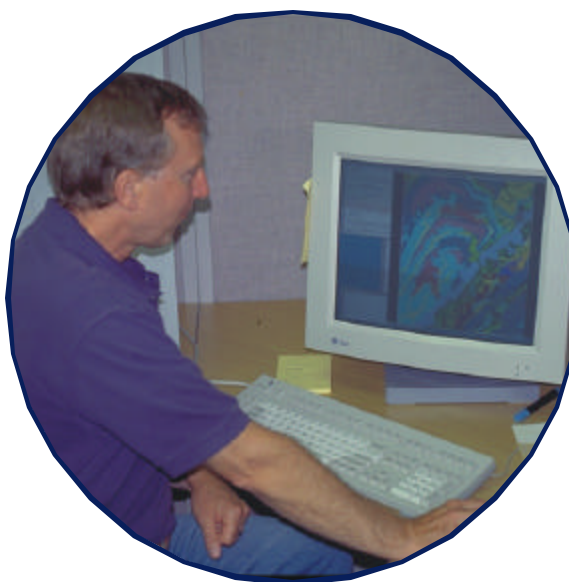
## The Earth Team

NRCS Earth Team Volunteers are valuable members of the conservation team. In the past five years, more than 8,000 volunteers have contributed approximately

81 staff years, a \$2.4 million benefit. Over 80 percent of our offices have at least one Earth Team Volunteer.

## Budget

Historically, the majority of Alabama NRCS's budget has gone toward technical assistance, with the largest portion to conservation operations. Conservation operations funds translate most directly to field office staff—the people who provide technical assistance to help private landowners put conservation on the ground.





# Programs and Services

**A**s the nation's primary technical conservation agency, NRCS is responsible for several federal conservation programs.

## Conservation Operations

Through local soil and water conservation districts, NRCS provides direct technical assistance to individuals, groups, communities, and government agencies. Assistance includes natural resource inventories and assessments, and assistance in developing and implementing conservation plans to protect and enhance natural and cultural resources on private lands.

## Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)

Nine multi-county RC&D Councils in Alabama work with local groups and organizations to develop economic, social, cultural, and natural resources in ways that help improve their area's economy, environment, and quality of life.

## Soil Surveys

Soil surveys are published scientific inventories that identify and classify soils according to a national system and provide information on potential limitations and uses of each soil. For a century, NRCS soil surveys have assisted farmers, community leaders, developers, conservationists, and others make wise natural resource management decisions.



## National Resources Inventory (NRI)

Every five years NRCS conducts the NRI, a national comprehensive survey to evaluate conditions and trends of natural resources on nonfederal rural lands. NRI data helps Alabamians recognize changes being made to natural resources. Results of the most recent NRI data are available at [www.nhq.nrcs.usda.gov/CCS/NRIrlse.html](http://www.nhq.nrcs.usda.gov/CCS/NRIrlse.html).

### **Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP)**

Through EWP, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to safeguard lives and property when watersheds and infrastructure are damaged by natural disasters.

### **Small Watershed Program (Public Law-566)**

NRCS helps urban and rural communities develop and improve water and land resources in watersheds up to 250,000 acres. Projects address flood prevention, erosion and sediment control, wildlife habitat enhancement, recreation, water quality, and land treatment.





## **Outreach**

NRCS in Alabama has undertaken a major initiative to provide outreach and technical assistance to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. The overall goal of Outreach is to increase the number of small or limited resource and minority producers and directly improve their farm income. Actions include assisting in securing grants and by entering agreements with community-based organizations and educational institutions. The dollars from these grants and agreements are used to teach these customers how to obtain and use technical assistance from USDA and other sources.

## **Cultural Resources Compliance**

NRCS recognizes that cultural resources (archeological and historic sites) are an integral part of our natural heritage. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and its amendments established a national policy for considering the effect of federal actions, permits, and funding to cultural resources. The Alabama NRCS Cultural Resource Specialist works with landowners to identify and evaluate cultural resources in the planning phase of all assistance activities.



# Farm Bill Programs

## Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

This voluntary program helps people develop and improve habitat for fish and wildlife on private lands. WHIP provides both technical assistance and cost-share funds through 10-year contracts. There are 171 active conservation plans on 14,584 acres of wildlife land. Five new conservation plans/contracts were prepared this year.

## Wetland Compliance

NRCS is responsible for providing assistance to protect wetlands. This includes performing wetland determinations when requested and evaluating whether planned drainage is maintenance of existing drainage or an improvement.

## Highly Erodible Land (HEL) Conservation

Since compliance was implemented in the 1985 Farm Bill, Alabama's NRCS staff has assisted USDA program participants in developing conservation compliance plans that are providing erosion control on more than 84,000 acres of HEL. NRCS also provides assistance to install and maintain acceptable HEL conservation systems.



### **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**

The NRCS also plays a very important role in CRP. NRCS staff provide technical assistance to landowners interested in enrolling land in CRP by helping them process bids, develop conservation plans, and establish permanent vegetation on environmentally sensitive cropland. In this voluntary program, landowners sign 10 to 15 year contracts and receive annual rental payments. Alabama currently has 481,873 acres enrolled under 9,678 conservation planning contracts. This includes 6,630 acres which are enrolled in continuous CRP. In

FY2000, 967 conservation plans/contracts will be implemented on 39,713 acres. There are 500 conservation plans/contracts expected in continuous CRP.

### **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)**

This program assists landowners that voluntarily restore and protect wetlands on private property by offering options of restoration cost-share agreements for a minimum of 10 years, 30-year easements, and permanent easements. Alabama has 10 contracts for restored wetlands. Eleven hundred eighty acres are being restored through WRP, Emergency Wetlands Reserve Program, EWP, and CRP.





### **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**

This voluntary conservation program addresses serious threats to soil, water, and related natural resources through 5 to 10 year contracts. There are 58 priority areas in Alabama with 2,440 conservation plans/contracts active on over 150,000 acres of land. In 2000, there have been 530 conservation plans/contracts prepared on over 36,000 acres. Sixty percent of Alabama EQIP funds went to manage animal waste and improve water quality, 20 percent to erosion reduction, and 20 percent to improved grazing. EQIP provides geographically targeted technical, financial, and educational assistance to maximize environmental benefits.

### **Forestry Incentive Program (FIP)**

This year, Alabama received over 1,000 applications for assistance under this program. Of these, 338 conservation plans/contracts, totaling more than \$970,000, were funded.

### **Alabama Agricultural Conservation Development Commission Cost-Share Program**

Funds from this program resulted in 1,054 conservation plans being prepared on over 41,000 acres.



# Conservation Partners

**N**RCS coordinates with many partners to set conservation goals and provide the best possible assistance to landusers. The Alabama Conservation Partnership includes NRCS; the Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Committee; Alabama Association of Conservation Districts; and the Alabama Association of RC&D Councils.

These partners work together to provide technical and financial assistance to landowners through Alabama's 67 soil and water conservation districts. Cooperation involves coordinating staff, sharing equipment, and adopting common technical standards.

NRCS and the Alabama Conservation Partnership also work with groups and agencies that share similar missions and goals. Partners vary by project, but often include universities; local, state, and federal agencies; commodity groups; agricultural and environmental organizations; professional societies; and many others.



## Partner's Express Their Visions for the Future

### Alabama Association of Conservation Districts-

"We envision a productive and profitable land, resulting from a harmonious balance of crops, livestock, forests, and conservation practices that provide diversity to the landscape and the landowner."

-Jake Harper, President

### Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Committee-

"Our vision includes Alabama farmers and their neighbors working together to understand shared needs for a productive and quality environment. It is important that people continue to respect agriculture and the family farmer as an important industry, resource, and part of our rural and urban landscape."

-Micky Smith, Chairman

### Alabama Association of Resource Conservation & Development Councils-

"The vision of RC&D in Alabama is to provide for the sustainability of local economies and resources. Our nine RC&D councils coordinate resource conservation and rural development assistance throughout the state. We bring people together at the grassroots level, and help them work together to develop solutions to their unique problems, and meet their special needs."

-Patsy Sumrall, President

# Conservation Achievements

## Alabamians Meet Challenges

Alabama's citizens have a strong history of working together to successfully address resource challenges. Through the years, committed landusers and skilled professionals have worked together to improve and protect natural resources on Alabama's private lands.

*Alabama Conservation - Our Success Story* is created and published to celebrate our achievements in natural resources conservation on private lands throughout the state.

The following pages highlight some of our specific conservation accomplishments:

- Conservation buffers
- Cost-share assistance
- Wildlife habitat
- Forestry
- Soil surveys
- Conservation education
- Cultural resources
- Emergency Watershed Program
- Conservation tillage



We acknowledge the hard work and dedication of thousands of our state's landowners who have cared for the soil, water, cultural resources, and wildlife, as well as the many local, state, and federal agencies that work closely with them.

Our accomplishments are significant achievements from which we all benefit and of which we can all be proud.

## Conservation Buffers

As of December 2000, Alabama landusers have installed over 18,224 acres in conservation buffers of grass and trees. Buffers help improve water quality in lakes and streams. Nationally, NRCS's goal is to have 2 million miles or 7.2 million acres of buffers by the year 2002.





### **State Cost-Share Assistance**

In addition to federal cost-share assistance, Alabama has a state cost-share program available to local landowners. These funds are used by local landowners to install conservation practices that help reduce erosion of Alabama's soil. The demand for cost-share assistance continues to increase with \$2.2 million offered during FY2000.

### **Wildlife Habitat**

Because of developing and maintaining good wildlife habitat, whitetail deer, wild turkeys, quail, eagles, duck, geese, songbirds, and other wildlife are increasing in Alabama. Wildlife specialists estimate that Alabama now has 1.4 million deer and 350,000 turkeys.

### **Forestry**

Two-thirds of Alabama is covered with forests. There are nearly 22 million acres growing over 15 billion trees. Alabama forests grow 4,000 trees for every man, woman, and child in the state. Ninety-five percent of Alabama's forests are privately owned. Owners and managers of these forests work with NRCS in managing their land. Advice and cost-share assistance are available for tree planting, timber stand improvement, and wildlife habitat management.

### **Soil Surveys**

Soil surveys have established a foundation for sound resource decisions for the last century. More than 625 soil types have been identified during soil surveys that have been completed in 56 of Alabama's 67 counties. Alabamians can now access soil information digitally for many different uses.



### **Conservation Education**

Conservation district boards, and many others help ensure that Alabama children develop an appreciation for natural resources. Districts sponsor poster and essay contests and participate in Project Wild, Project Wet, FAWN, outdoor classrooms, nature trails, and urban gardens.

## Cultural Resources

NRCS in Alabama has worked closely with the Alabama Historical Commission to consider and report cultural resources. About 2,400 acres are inspected every year prior to NRCS technical or financial assistance. Because of this pre-planning, no NRCS practice or activity has been delayed or halted due to the presence of cultural resources. A recent cultural resources survey resulted in the re-discovery of the railroad bed that served the Marion-Cahawba Railway, a pre-Civil War railroad that was salvaged and re-routed to Selma's Munitions Factory in 1863. Another survey for an EWP project has prompted the testing and excavation of portions of an archaeological site in Jackson County with archeological deposits dating from the Archaic Period (8,000 years ago) to the Mississippian Period (800 years ago). The reports from the railroad survey and the archaeological testing will be posted on the Cultural Resources section of the Alabama NRCS home page at ([www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov/al](http://www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov/al)).



## Emergency Watershed Protection

When a major storm event occurs, NRCS assembles an emergency team to travel to disaster areas and offer assistance. During the past three years, almost \$22 million in EWP funds helped Alabama communities rebuild and recover from numerous natural disasters.

## Conservation Tillage

Conservation tillage, defined as 30 percent residue cover after planting, is the cornerstone of conservation systems in Alabama. The number of farmers using this conservation practice continues to increase as farmers observe the success of their neighbors in using the environmentally friendly practice. During 1998, 35 percent of Alabama's crops were grown using conservation tillage methods. A current survey is expected to show that conservation tillage has increased 45 percent.

## Our Future

NRCS will continue to work with landowners and conservation partners to care for the natural resources of Alabama, ensuring a healthy and productive state for generations to come.



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